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ABSTRACT

A recent study of doctoral programs in ten prestigious universities by Ann Heiss found that graduate students tend to be committed to their academic fields, attracted to the world of ideas, independent-minded, and concerned about the relevance of their disciplines to social problems. The study also found that graduate schools tend to be a stress-filled environment where the emphasis was rarely on teaching or learning, where the educational process was often dehumanizing, and where the fixation on grades and credits corrupted the meaning of graduate study. Since real education is self-initiated and continual rather than a system of classification and production based on external compulsion, and since the primary responsibility for learning rests with the individual rather than the institution, it is imperative that graduate education be changed and become student or client-based. This paper proposes six client-based patterns for graduate student participation in the academic decisionmaking that most affects them. These are: (1) self-determination of program; (2) student course initiation; (3) student involvement in planning course structure; (4) client evaluation of the educational system; (5) a graduate studies committee for the systematic investigation of the program; and (6) the replacement of the department by the academic commune as the learning unit of the school. (AF)

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CLIENT-BASED PATTERNS FOR REFORMING GRADUATE EDUCATION

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Graduate education continues to ignore the characteristics and needs of its clients and the nature of the learning process. Generally, graduate students are seriously committed to personal goals, yet they are treated via inflexible programs and insufficient personal participation as if they had no individual goals or objectives.

A recently published study of doctoral programs in ten prestigious universities provides a fresh perspective on the character of contemporary graduate education. Ann Heiss found graduate students to be earnestly committed to their academic fields, attracted to the world of ideas, independent-minded, and concerned about the relevance of their disciplines to social problems. She also discovered graduate school to be a stress-filled environment in which the emphasis is frequently not on teaching and seldom systematically on learning, in which the "educational" process is often dehumanizing, and in which the standardized fixation on grades, credits and other familiar undergraduate constraints corrupts the meaning of graduate study.[1]

Position paper prepared for a panel on Student Participation in the Decision Making Processes of Schools of Public Affairs, Annual Conference, National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration, Boulder, Colorado, April 16-18, 1971.

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Students work the hardest and gain the greatest satisfaction when they are intrinsically interested in something, but the current education system institutionalizes extrinsic rewards apparently under the assumption that pressure and tension promote learning. For the most meaningful type of learning to the individual, the degree of personal involvement is important; however, graduate students regularly face required courses and instructors who have already completely prepared the course content and requirements before even meeting their students. Most effective learning develops in an environment of cooperative and mutual inquiry, but the psychological press of graduate school fosters a culture which inhibits open confrontation of difficult issues, penalizes risk-taking and aggressiveness, promotes competition, and rewards certain types of interpersonal styles most often referred to as academic gamesmanship. Open communication is needed to facilitate good learning, yet graduate students frequently perceive faculty to be inaccessible and insensitive to their problems. Because of its importance to the learner, personal assessment of achievement is the most significant kind, yet course requirements are often based on documenting "objective" grading without regard to the student's objectives.

Real education is self-initiated and continual rather than a system of classification and production based on external compulsion. The primary responsibility for learning rests with the individual rather than the institution, although the university obviously is needed to facilitate and enhance this process. Too often graduate students doggedly pursue the hurdles erected in graduate school, hoping that with degree in hand they can then pursue subjects which interest them. It is imperative that students' academic work be integrated with the rest of their lives. Patterns for reforming graduate education need to be student or client-based, to treat students as individuals and to change the relationships among the people involved in the learning process.

It is not surprising how few graduate students feel that they should be excluded from academic decision making which affects them. However, the amount of faculty agreement is unexpected because it is not manifest in institutional practices. The attitudes of the members of the American academic community toward graduate student participation are reflected in recently released survey data presented to the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education:[2]

"What role do you believe graduate students should play in decisions on the following?"

	Percentage Responding Indicating LITTLE OR NO ROLE	
	Graduate Students in Universities	Faculty in Universities
Advanced Degree Requirements	12	20
Provision and Content of Graduate Courses	3	6
Department Admissions Policy	18	43
Faculty Appointments and Promotions	24	29

It is also not surprising, then, that the Heiss in-depth study shows that graduate students are beginning to find their voices and may be the most potent force for academic reform within graduate schools today. She reports that approximately thirty percent of the graduate students surveyed had already participated as change agents in their department or school. In which decisions and in what way should graduate students participate? This is to propose six client-based patterns for graduate student participation in the academic decision making which most affects them. The first five suggestions fit within the traditional departmental or program context. The last proposal presents an alternative structure around which graduate education might be centered.

1. Self-determination of program. This proposal calls for the graduate student to design his own academic program in consultation with his faculty committee chairman, who is selected by the student with the concurrence of the faculty member. The graduate student and his chairman would jointly choose the other members of the student's committee based on the student's scholarly interests. In a sense, the student would propose a contract which was acceptable to his faculty committee, and upon its successful completion he would be awarded his degree. The contract could be changed at any time with the mutual consent of the graduate student and his committee. If his areas of emphasis were to change, so might one or more of his committee members. Since this type of mechanism assumes no specific departmental-wide curricular requirements, the importance of faculty advising and student-faculty interaction is increased. The problem with required courses is that which is relevant to one student's program is often not relevant to another's. The student would likely propose an area of concentration or major and one, two or more minors and tools for his program based on his objectives. The graduate student and his committee would meet frequently to assess his progress.[3]

2. Student course initiation. Curricular offerings should not be based solely on tradition, faculty personal preference or current research interests. The clients should indicate their needs first.

In addition, this proposal can include a provision for graduate students or graduate students and faculty jointly (in addition to just faculty) to offer to "lead" courses. Procedures would be established so that well in advance of each term such a course could be proposed and advertised. If sufficient interest among graduate students is generated, then the course initiators would submit a prospectus or set of organizing concepts to the department which could result in the course's being approved for credit and listed in the school bulletin. Any student or faculty member could then participate in the course.

3. Student involvement in planning course structure. This is related to the previous proposal, although the idea of student participation in planning the structure of a course somewhat violates the traditional ethos of the academy. Students have long realized that the same course taught by two different professors can be very different in orientation and content. This recommendation involves the client, not just the instructor, in determining the nature of a course. It introduces the notion that different individuals or groups of individuals might have different personal objectives in a course and that different course requirements (e.g., research paper vs. final exam) are appropriate for different individuals. It also opens the door to self-evaluation in coordination with the professor.

It should be noted that this pattern does not minimize the role of the teacher, but alters it to facilitate the client's goals. The importance of the faculty member's command of the course subject is not changed, although it does suggest that others in the class might have expertise to contribute. The professor would certainly have to act responsibly in setting parameters for the course of study. It is my experience that adaptation by both faculty and students used to total faculty dominance in the classroom to this type of instructional system requires greater ingenuity, time and individual responsibility from all, but it is worth it.

4. Client evaluation of the educational system. Systematic evaluation of teaching has been a serious shortcoming in American universities. Recently, however, there has been a proliferation of course and teacher evaluation at the undergraduate level. Course evaluation can obviously be useful for feedback to the professor on the content of the course, his teaching style and the usefulness of the readings. However, a Student-Faculty Dialogue on Courses can also serve other purposes. The initial evaluation is properly and anonymously done by students. Each faculty member should have the opportunity to respond to the results, if desired, in the same document. After the findings are reproduced and distributed, a discussion

session or series of them might be held to consider the implications of the survey.

Pressures exist in the faculty reward structure which have emphasized criteria other than classroom and advisory behavior. The findings of such a course and teacher evaluation should be an important in-put in the consideration of faculty for tenure, promotion, and merit salary increases. The goal of this is not to penalize the faculty member; rather, it is to obtain his behavioral adaptation because good teaching is now documented and therefore important.

Suitably adapted to the nature of graduate education and specific fields and programs, a Student-Faculty Dialogue on Courses could also be important in developing curricula and in analyzing degree programs. Certain problems would quickly become obvious, such as courses overlapping or insufficient articulation between two courses supposedly in a sequence. This type of evaluation should serve as a vehicle for both graduate students and faculty to analyze the effectiveness of current graduate courses and programs.[4]

Imagine if these four proposals were implemented in a department. A graduate student might now be sitting in a course which he initiated with another student or faculty member and which is related to the area of concentration in his academic program. In addition, he might have helped to shape the structure of the course and to formulate his specific assignments. The student is expected to actively contribute to the course, and he knows that he will play a role in both his own evaluation as well as that of the course and instructor. Remember that all of these are directly related to his personal objectives. It is obvious (at least to me) that the familiar constraints of graduate education do not promote this type of environment for learning and intellectual growth.

5. Graduate studies committee. Even today many departments and programs do not have graduate studies committees for systematic investigation into the unit's graduate program and for planned improvement of that program. Such a committee might be composed, for example, of half students and half faculty, members to be elected by their respective groups. The interaction of the two groups has repeatedly proved to be highly informative, and the history of these groups -- at least at Syracuse University -- shows much more consensus evolving than conflict. One reason more departmental graduate studies committees of this type do not exist relates to the question of direct student participation. Yet, Heiss discovered a more significant difficulty: while faculty members concur in the need for curricular reform, they are extremely reluctant to participate on committees dealing with these problems.

6. The academic commune. The academic commune deals with the issues raised previously within a different structure. The commune would replace the department as the learning unit of the school (although it might be desirable to retain graduate departments for coordination and other reasons). An academic commune is a group of students and faculty with common interests and objectives. It would be a cooperative rather than competitive venture where scholars would learn to work as a team for their mutual benefit.[5] The members of the commune would decide what they wanted to do and how they desired to do it. They would judge their own admissions to the group, determine their own degree requirements, and, for example, originate their own non-traditional, credit-bearing learning experiences, like a commune social action research program. They would probably be multidisciplinary. An individual would be free to leave the commune at any time. Communes would seek to promote an organizational climate for authentic communication and peak learning experiences. A school might officially charter communes based on certain minimum requirements and periodically monitor their

educational programs. A common meeting place is obviously desirable, but members of an academic commune would not necessarily live in a common dwelling or dwellings. Communes could center around such areas as environmental management, normative political theory, development administration and street-level bureaucracy.

The purpose of these proposals is to encourage universities to treat students as human beings and to increase their flexibility in adapting to the naturally diverse needs of individuals. These suggestions necessarily stress the motivational and collaborative nature of the learning process. In addition, with this type of student participation in academic decision making, faculties will less frequently act as custodians of conventional wisdom and its curriculum. Increasingly faculty members will have to pursue content and role innovation to provide a curriculum responsive to the university's clients.

It is likely that developments in the future will increase the necessity for the university's being client-oriented. In educating individuals for the public service, the rapidity of societal change and the creation of adaptive, temporary organization systems will bring practioner-students back to the university frequently during their lifetimes. Universities will simultaneously be training generalists to be specialists and specialists to be generalists, if those terms still have meaning. Public administrators at all levels will need more training. The practioner will seek education for a variety of purposes: for updating his knowledge of the field, for self-understanding and renewal, for additional information about social problems, for training in new management techniques, and for education relating to specialized tasks.[6,7] The learning process will continue to consume increasing amounts of the individual's life activities.[8] The clients of graduate education of tomorrow will even more naturally participate in the formulation of their own academic programs because they will have specific reasons for

returning to the campus. Universities and Schools of Public Affairs will not be able to be irrelevant; those which are not client-oriented will be very small or cease to exist.

FOOTNOTES

1 Ann M. Heiss, Challenges to Graduate Schools (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., 1970). She studied twelve core departments in the arts and sciences at each institution. Graduate and academic deans and department chairmen were interviewed, and approximately 1,600 graduate faculty members and 3,500 doctoral students were surveyed.

2 Martin Trow, Preliminary Findings from National Surveys of American Higher Education (Berkeley: Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, January 15, 1971), p. 27. This is based on a 1969 survey of more than 60,000 faculty members, 30,000 graduate students, and 70,000 undergraduates at 300 institutions deemed to be approximately representative of the over 2,500 colleges and universities in the United States.

3 The prototypes for this proposal are the City University (of New York) Bachelor of Arts degree presented to the CUNY Board of Higher Education on February 22, 1971, and the Interdisciplinary Social Science Program offered by The Maxwell Graduate School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University, since 1946.

4 The prototype for this proposal was the "Student-Faculty Dialogue on Courses," Harvard Graduate School of Education, September, 1967.

5 An interesting collateral trend is the development of therapeutic communities in the treatment of mental illness in hospitals. While the traditional role differentiation there was at least as great as that between students and faculty, today both patients and staff in these communities share the work and participate in the decision making which affects them, benefiting from joint participation and mutual effort.

6 Frederick C. Mosher, "The Public Service in the Temporary Society," Public Administration Review, XXXI (January-February, 1971), pp. 47-62.

7 Because of a diverse environment, represented by the university's clients or students, this paper argues for differentiation within universities. This would include broadening the often narrowly conceived definition of education for the public service. But, it should also be clear that the place of schools of public affairs/administration is essential to maintain the client-orientation needed and to facilitate an integrative mechanism to manage the differentiation effectively.

8 Furthermore, many of us predict, and welcome, higher education without degrees, a change from the degree-based, industrial "credential society" to the talent-based, post-industrial "learning society."